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### Cutline: Poetry among the ruins: Greg Pape

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Feb. 14, 1990

CUTLINE

Greg Pape relaxes at his Stevensville home. (UM  
photo/Howard Skaggs)

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Montana weeklies

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## Indian Ruins Along Rio de Flag

I'm learning how to read the rocks,  
how to tell the difference between  
those that lie where the magma  
cooled and hardened, and those  
that are the ruined walls of homes.

They lived here because of the river.  
They sang the river where the sun shone,  
where the night sky glittered.  
I can almost hear them sometimes  
when I cross the river.

Now it's a pitiful stream  
lined with red and white signs  
that read contaminated -- an open  
sewer we call Rio de Flag.  
No one knows what they called it.

No one knows what they sang  
when they saw the river of fire.  
When the fire cooled and the dead  
were sung they planted corn and squash  
in the cinders and bathed their children

in the river and built their homes  
of rocks that once were fire.

I'm learning how to watch the birds  
as they fly off into the distance  
until they turn into distance,  
into nothing I can see, like spirits,  
and then go on watching, as they must have,

until something in the distance  
turns into birds again.

By Greg Pape, from the book "Storm Pattern"